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Beverly Auto Repair Shop Fire

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan and Beverly Fire Chief Richard F. Pierce announced investigators have determined the most probable cause of the St. Patrick's Day fire at 146 Hale Street was electrical. The only heat source investigators found in the tiny bathroom of the automotive repair shop where the fire started was a wall light fixture that had recently suffered some minor damage.

A variety of flammable liquids are used in the automotive repair business and investigators believe that the explosions reported by witnesses were caused when cans of spray paint or other flammable liquids stored in the building exploded during the fire. These flammable liquids cause the fire to burn intensely at extreme temperatures. Firefighters from Beverly, Danvers, Hamilton, Manchester, Peabody, Salem and Wenham prevented the fire from spreading to any neighboring homes or businesses. Damages to the building and the four vehicles that were inside are estimated at \$500,000. Essex, Middleton and Swampscott Fire Departments provided coverage for the rest of the city during the fire.

Chief Pierce said, "Given the extreme destruction of the building, I applaud the work of the investigation team who was able to conduct a thorough forensic examination of the scene, correlate that information with witness statements, and quickly and accurately determine the most probable ignition scenario." He added, "I would like to acknowledge great job the firefighters did to extinguish the fire, for protecting the neighboring buildings, and to our neighboring fire departments who provided mutual aid."

State Fire Marshal Coan said, "Major fire incidents such as this demonstrate the effectiveness of the team-concept, witness-driven fire investigation protocol used in Massachusetts. Our office is able to infuse local investigation teams with the added manpower needed to dig out a fire scene like this and to rapidly interview the many witnesses."

The fire was investigated jointly by the Beverly Fire Department and State Police investigators in the Office of the State Fire.